

Seek an education while pursuing the degree

Earning a degree and getting an education are independent acts. A degree and an education are not the same thing. In fact, one can acquire either one independent of the other. I believe students should seek to acquire both.

What does it mean to "get a degree" and what does it mean to "get an education?" Seeking a degree is about asking the question, "Will this be on the test?" whereas seeking an education is about asking almost every other question imaginable. Seeking a degree is submitting work that will "make the grade," while seeking an education is about writing draft after draft after draft.

Seeking a degree is arguing for points toward a more desirable grade. Seeking an education is about finding out what went wrong and fixing it. Cheating is degree-seeking behavior. Ultimately, seeking a degree is about building a resume while seeking an education is about building a mind.

The pressure to favor degree over education comes from many directions. Universities, for instance, are under increasing pressure to grow enrollments and produce graduates. This is the reason college credit is offered for high-school courses. Parents tend to want their offspring to "get on with it" and complete a degree. And culturally speaking, the material goods we find ourselves so enchanted by require a bit more income than a work-study position can offer. In short, almost every aspect of our current environment is set up to promote degree-seeking behavior.

Why, then, seek an education rather than a degree? Acquiring an education cer-

tainly requires more effort than acquiring a degree. I will momentarily refrain from the pat answer — that the journey is the thing — and will instead make an appeal to your human nature. Specifically to your competitive nature.

A pragmatic answer to the question of "Why do it?" is that it should be done because not everybody does it. Today, the college degree is much like the high school degree was 30 years ago, when the high school degree was all that was necessary to "get a good job." These days, that's a college degree, and everybody's getting one.

The National Center for Education Statistics projects that there will be more than 1.5 million college graduates from the class of 2008. That is, it is important to note, only the class of 2008. If we add the two years before 2008, and the two years after 2008,

then about 7.6 million college graduates will be "on the market" in the near future. This is a large group of people with whom you will be competing for jobs.

But don't despair. There are plenty of jobs for you. Also, remember, these are people who are degreed, not necessarily educated. The degree is just a stand-in, a representation of what employers really want and need: people who can think for themselves, people who can critically evaluate information that is presented to them, people who are creative and original. This is the knowledge, and these are the skills, that define being educated. Degrees, as it turns out, may open doors, but it is education that promotes success once the door is open.

This is, of course, not the

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Learn: Education sets grads apart

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only reason to seek an education while seeking a degree. The other reason is related to the fulfillment of human potential. After all, what sort of psychologist would I be if I did not at least briefly encourage self-actualization? It turns out the journey may indeed be the thing.

Universities are special places, where education can be sought and obtained. It is not easy, and it should not be easy. Obtaining an education can mean resisting cultural forces while simultaneously resisting the impulse for an iPhone, or for a newer car, or a better plate of pasta. But it is worthwhile. Earning a degree and getting an education are independent acts.

They are not the same thing. But true education is a worthwhile endeavor that I encourage everybody to pursue.

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